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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [FR](#) [AF](#) [PA](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: GENERAL PETRAEUS DISCUSSES AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN,
SYRIA, IRAN AND PIRACY WITH FRENCH OFFICIALS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. During a September 25-26 visit to Paris to receive military honors, General David Petraeus met with French interlocutors including DefMin Herve Morin, PM Francois Fillon, Secretary-General of the MFA Gerard Errera (D-equivalent) and President Sarkozy's diplomatic advisor Jean-David Levitte, as well as military leaders. French officials were interested in the progress of counter-insurgency efforts in Iraq and in new initiatives that might work in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan. The GOF, which is fully committed to Afghanistan, continues to confront weak public support and a divided parliament. Paris views the situation in Pakistan as "more than difficult" and hopes that Zardari's statements of support to battle the insurgents in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas will translate into action. French officials insist they are "not naive" on Syria and expect Damascus to meet clear benchmarks in response to French overtures. Iran remains the pre-eminent security threat and France is continuing efforts in the EU and nationally to apply economic pressure to comply with non-proliferation requirements. Piracy off the horn of Africa remains a major policy issue for the French government and they welcome NATO interest in continuing efforts to attract naval assets to combat this problem. The French have gone as far as to propose the international legal framework for their anti-piracy efforts. (Embassy Comment: One of President Sarkozy's advisors subsequently informed us that the visit of General Petraeus was very valuable and resulted in a briefing to the President that the situation in Iraq had improved and it was now time for France to invest there.) End Summary.

IRAQ

12. (C/NF) In every meeting, as in his speech to the international military students at the Ecole Militaire, General Petraeus shared with interlocutors his views of the evolving situation in Iraq and the dramatic progress in overall security that is demonstrable in recent months. He attributed progress of the surge to an overall effort that mobilized and coordinated all elements of national power, including security, intelligence, economic assistance, information, diplomatic and political actions. He consistently noted that a purely military solution is not an option, but establishing security is the first requirement before other progress will occur. His interlocutors were impressed by his command of the situation and the charts

which clearly demonstrated progress. He was particularly clear in discussion with DefMin Morin, who appeared unaware of the improvement in the overall situation. When Morin acknowledged that the source of his pessimism was Saudi and other Gulf State interlocutors, Petraeus firmly and effectively countered what he termed was misinformation based on reporting by Sunni, former Baathist exiles with no interest in seeing Iraq succeed. He strongly urged Morin and others in France to seek better informed sources. Ambassador Stapleton commented during the meeting that it is important for France to have a good understanding of the progress Iraqis have made, supported by the coalition, since we will face different challenges in Afghanistan together. Petraeus commented in each of his meetings that while many lessons have been learned in Iraq and some may be of use in Afghanistan, we must also understand that Afghanistan presents its unique set of challenges. As examples, he mentioned Afghanistan's lack of human and natural resources and the absence of a tradition of central government authority outside the major cities. He also cautioned that despite significant progress in Iraq, the situation remains fragile. Basically, in Iraq we are rebuilding; in Afghanistan we are starting from scratch. In each meeting, Petraeus stressed that he is not in command of US CENTCOM until October 31. His initial findings, however, led him to believe that a comprehensive approach to the Afghan issues will be important; that he fully agreed on the need to develop good intelligence; and he stressed the success of intelligence fusion operations in Iraq as a potential model. He also noted that counter-insurgency tactics that worked in Iraq may well need to be modified to meet the very different needs of the very different situation in Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN

13. (C) In every meeting, Petraeus expressed condolences for the loss of 10 French soldiers in Afghanistan in August, an issue that was much on the political leaders' minds. Errera noted that the September 22 vote to reauthorize the French mission in Afghanistan was a success, but added that the decision of the Socialist Party to vote "no" rather than abstain, marked the first time in French history that there was public disunity on a military deployment. (Embassy comment: The French parliamentary vote was a historic first, as prior to this summer's constitutional revisions, the parliament had no authority to pronounce on troop deployments. Parliament now has the right to reauthorize a military mission four months after a deployment, but still cannot modify the deployment in anyway). While Errera and Levitte both emphasized that President Sarkozy is "absolutely committed" to Afghanistan, the debate and vote showed that the broader political spectrum remains uncertain over the level of French involvement there. Errera noted that public support for the war in Afghanistan is low in other European countries as well, making it imperative to focus on more than just a "military solution." Petraeus reiterated that a purely military solution is not possible. Errera stated, in particular, the major challenge is to ensure that ISAF is not viewed as an "occupying force." Levitte added that two-thirds of the French population don't understand why their troops are serving so far away, but on the other hand massive public support exists for helping the Afghan people. General Petraeus agreed that a comprehensive approach is necessary, but stated that improving security in Afghanistan is a prerequisite to allow for political and economic development.

14. (C) Levitte and Errera also urged further efforts at "national reconciliation" in Afghanistan. There was also broad French interest in some of the tactics used to counter the insurgency in Iraq and the various interlocutors inquired whether similar measures would be effective in Afghanistan. Levitte and Errera both regretted President Karzai's weak political position, with Levitte stating that Karzai is losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the population.

"Corruption is the sin of his government," Levitte stated, observing that Karzai has failed to get out of Kabul and take reconciliation dialogue directly to the tribes. Levitte agreed that Kai Eide,s leadership has not been "all that it might be" to bring the disparate elements together, but stressed that it is Karzai who is the main disappointment. Errera also asked for USG suggestions on how to improve coordination at the political level, given President Karzai's reluctance to have a strong representative of the international community. DefMin Morin questioned the wisdom of NATO considering acquiring AWACS surveillance aircraft for the theater when the funds could be better spent improving the situation for the Afghans themselves. He argued that we would do better to put our money into quickly building up the Afghan army and police and other institutions. Morin also highlighted the problems caused by air strikes leading to civilian casualties.

PAKISTAN: "MORE THAN DIFFICULT"

¶5. (S/NF) Errera observed that the current situation in Pakistan is "more than difficult" and that the instability there was becoming a regional problem. The GOF was disappointed that the attempt to put the ISI intelligence service under civilian control had lasted "only a couple of hours." Petraeus responded, as he did in other meetings, that we had confidence in General Kayani, who understood the threat that the safe havens in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas posed to the security of Pakistan. Unfortunately, the Pakistani military had been trained to fight a conventional war with India rather than a sophisticated counter-insurgency on their own territory. The Pakistanis want to "do it themselves" and are resisting having outside countries be seen as helping too much. Levitte mentioned that Sarkozy met with Zardari in New York on the margins of UNGA. Levitte,s personal opinion of Zardari is

that he was a little better than reported, but the bar was set pretty low. That said, Zardari says the right things, including declaring his determination to fight the Taliban who he blames for his wife,s death. Levitte regretted that the trip by Sarkozy,s military advisor, Admiral Guillaud, to Pakistan had been delayed because of the Somali piracy issues, but assured Petraeus that France wanted to stay in close touch on the issue and to carry the same message. (Note: The trip was rescheduled to begin October 4). The declining Pakistani economic situation also preoccupied French officials, with one interlocutor commenting that the Marriott hotel bombing will only hurt future investment and drives home the need for security.

SYRIA: PARIS "NOT NAIVE"

¶6. (S/NF) Errera emphasized that the GOF is "not naive" regarding Syria and that it is evaluating carefully whether overtures on the French side yield visible actions by the Syrians. He said Syria must demonstrate results in Lebanon and Israel, noting that if the Israelis could talk to the Syrians through Turkey, then France should be able to have a dialogue with the Syrians as well. They were interested to hear whether the USG believed that Syria's actions with regard to Iraq have improved. In response, Petraeus noted that while we had witnessed an improvement in some areas, such as a decline in foreign fighters entering Iraq from Syria, these improvements were more accurately due to Coalition actions in damaging their infrastructure than to actions taken by Damascus.

IRAN:

¶7. (S/NF) For Paris, Iran,s quest for nuclear arms is the

number one preoccupation and threat to world peace. Levitte stated bluntly that the sanctions process at the UNSC is "going nowhere," but France continues to work with the US and EU-3 to strengthen actions. They are now working to raise the costs for insurance companies doing business with Iraq and they are interested in eliminating the transfer of some spare parts for oil refineries. Levitte acknowledged that this is a slow process, but said that we have to make clear to Ahmedinejad that social unrest is a time bomb and his policy of developing nuclear capability is limiting his ability to address social issues.

PIRACY: A HOT TOPIC IN PARIS

18. (C/NF) Levitte emphasized the importance Sarkozy and his government attach to dealing with the pirates operating off the coast of Somalia. He recalled that France had begun to address the issue when it began escorting WFP (World Food Program) vessels; they were incensed that the pirates were attacking food shipments destined for the poor of Somalia and he pledged that France would continue its efforts. More recently there had been an attack on French ships, which resulted in successful military rescue operations and capture of the criminals. Levitte noted that since January, 55 ships have been taken by the pirates who take hostages and seek money for ransom. Much of the shipping from Asia to Europe (48,000 ships per year, according to the French) transits the area under attack, as do tankers.

19. (C/NF) To address the issue, France has been active in securing two UNSC resolutions and is pressing for a third. The first two provide for the legal framework for action. Now they are trying to help the EU build a naval capacity that can escort the transiting ships. Unfortunately, they have run up against unwelcome opposition in the form of the ship owners, who prefer to pay the ransoms using insurance money. Levitte quipped that if the insurance companies are paying these vast sums, perhaps we should go to them to fund the escorts. Moreover, the pirates use the ransom money to purchase ever more sophisticated arms and they use the captured ships as "mother ships" or platforms from which to operate, allowing them to range effectively as far as 700

miles from the Somali coast. The EU alone cannot deal with this problem and France welcomes NATO review of the issue. Strategic Affairs Advisor Francois Richier noted that the issue of pursuit onto land was solved when the Somali leader agreed to support the UN resolutions. Now, France is exploring a cascading list of possible actions, ranging from: allowing civilian ships to arm themselves; recruiting additional EU ships to escort as a deterrent; encouraging CTF-150 to perform general surveillance; or securing additional counter-piracy capabilities through NATO if the Alliance so decides. He also clarified that the GOF does have authority to attack if the pirates threaten shipping and French plans call for escorting the pirated vessel to Djibouti, releasing the crew and sending the pirates to France for judicial handling.

10. (U) This message was cleared by General David Petraeus.

STAPLETON